Lauerman: Clean Hydrogen Civil War Series, Part 2 Call To Action

Daily Oil Bulletin

January 5, 2022 Wednesday

Copyright 2022 Nickle's Energy Group, a division of HCN Publications Company All Rights Reserved

Section: ANALYSIS, HYDROGEN

Length: 1053 words

Body

Part 1 of this two-part series showed how the recently launched Green Hydrogen Organization (GH2), as well as major environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, are attempting to thwart development of a global blue hydrogen industry.

Here, in Part 2, I will explore whether the technologically-agnostic Hydrogen Council is up to the task of defending blue hydrogen from this attack.

But before doing so I will discuss the key lessons learned from the ‘dirty oil' lobby's successful attack on the oilsands, segueing into a discussion of the 2018 book LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media by P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking. In my mind this is the best book on the newfound power of social media, arguing it is changing the face of warfare in all its forms because it's successfully being used to influence people through the internet.

And don't be mistaken. It is a form of warfare between the budding blue hydrogen industry and its adversaries, and the sooner proponents of the industry recognize this fact, and act accordingly, the more likely they will win the clean hydrogen civil war.

Lessons from the oilsands

As far as I can tell, the oilsands industry made three key mistakes that the global blue hydrogen industry must avoid to win its war. These are: underestimating the opposition; failing to take substantial action to deal with environmental impacts; and relying on logic rather than emotion in its messaging.

The oilsands industry has been pilloried for a litany of sins against land, water and especially air. To think the ‘dirty oil' lobby would back down because the industry was improving its emissions intensity, while rapidly increasing overall emissions, was misguided in the extreme, especially once the lobby began to smell blood.

In addition, messaging in support of the oilsands by industry associations - as well as the War Room more recently - with their narratives relying on facts and logic - and not emotion - simply wasn't going to cut it for reasons discussed in the next section.

Lessons from LikeWar

The 19th century Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz, in his 10-volume book On War, most famously argued that war is simply politics by other means. Winning war is a matter of finding and neutralizing an adversary's

‘center of gravity.' This is often a rival's army, but Clausewitz argued this is not always the most effective path. Shatter a rival's spirit, and you might win without even fighting an armed battle.

This has been easier said than done, until the age of social media, according to the authors of LikeWar. Modern warfare has seen numerous efforts to target and drain an enemy's spirit; as a rule with limited success. The German bombing Blitz of Britain during World War II is one of the best examples of failure to break an enemy's spirit, along with America's Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against the cities of North Vietnam during the late 1960s. War propaganda has proven equally ineffective.

'But in the space of a decade, social media has changed all that,' Singer and Brooking wrote. 'Attacking an adversary's most important center of gravity - the spirit of its people - no longer requires bombing runs or reams of propaganda. All it takes is a smartphone and a few idle seconds. And anyone can do it.'

According to Singer and Brooking there are five basic weapons for a successful LikeWar social media strategy: narrative, emotion, authenticity, community and inundation. The best narratives simplify complex realities and slot into other people's comprehension, resonate with pre-existing story lines, and tend to be quirky or contradictory.

'The big losers in this narrative battle are those people or institutions that are too big, too slow, or too hesitant to weave such stories,' Singer and Brooking warned. 'These are not the kinds of battles that a plodding, uninventive bureaucracy can win.'

The ‘dirty oil' lobby used the LikeWar social media strategy to combat our oilsands industry - just think of the photo of bitumen-covered ducks that went viral.

Hydrogen Council up to the task?

Since its founding in 2017, the Brussels-based and CEO-led Hydrogen Council has quickly become a key player promoting clean hydrogen as a means to achieve rapid decarbonization of the global economy. The goal of the Council has been to encourage a shift from grey to clean hydrogen production and to expand markets for hydrogen by promoting its use as an energy carrier. To achieve this two-pronged goal the Hydrogen Council convenes events and publishes studies.

Based on a perusal of the Hydrogen Council's website and two interviews with Daryl Wilson, the organization's executive director, over the past several months, I have no doubt the Council is an honest broker when it comes to clean hydrogen, while counseling the importance of minimal emissions from blue hydrogen production to maintain its social license.

'I do not view low-carbon [blue] hydrogen as a stepping stone to renewable [green] hydrogen,' Wilson said in an interview in November. 'Rather, they are two important standalone pathways for achieving rapid decarbonization. Low-carbon hydrogen allows us to achieve greater decarbonization quicker and at a lower cost, since it will take time to bring down the cost of renewable hydrogen. Of course, this is assuming low-carbon hydrogen projects are done right, with significant reductions in life cycle emissions, especially methane emissions.'

However, it is highly doubtful the Hydrogen Council will be able to wage the sort of war necessary to protect blue hydrogen from GH2 and the major environmental groups for three simple and interrelated reasons. They are: the Council's tools of choice are events and studies, not social media; some of its CEO members are anti-blue hydrogen, including Fortescue's Andrew Forrest; and hence, the Hydrogen Council will have neither the means nor the will to adopt the LikeWar social media strategy required to win the clean hydrogen civil war.

As a result, the budding global blue hydrogen industry should establish a dedicated and well-funded organization as quickly as possible to defend itself against the attack by GH2 and major environmental groups, including a strong social media arm deploying the same LikeWar strategy as we should expect from them.

Load-Date: January 5, 2022

End of Document